The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

Strong feelings of gratitude and sympathy must have been awakened among Christians everywhere by the courageous stand of the Church in Norway for truth and freedom. Since the early days of the Church conflict in Germany there has been no more striking witness to the power of the Christian faith to create loyalties which can defy the strongest tyranny.

THE CHURCH IN NORWAY

The Bishop of Oslo, Dr. Berggrav, who is known personally to many in this country through his visit in 1939 and to many more by his courageous championship of religious and national freedom, has been forced to resign. The six other bishops have also laid down their office, and the deans of the dioceses have refused to act as deputies. The occasion of the crisis was partly the attempt to enrol all young people in Quisling's youth movement ; and partly an order to change the arrangements for a service in Trondheim Cathedral on the day of Quisling's appointment as Prime Minister and to substitute a quisling clergyman as preacher instead of the dean. Thousands flocked to the cathedral for the ordinary service, which was held at a different hour, to listen to the dean, while the official service was attended by only a small handful of quislings. The consequent dismissal of the dean by the Church Department precipitated the crisis. Declarations of solidarity with the bishops have been made by an overwhelming majority of the clergy.

The connection between the Church and the schools in Norway is close, and it is reported that more than 9,000 teachers, out of a total of nearly 11,000, have resigned from the quisling teachers' association and have stuck to their resignations in spite of a government declaration that they would not only be dismissed without pension but be sent to forced labour in the north or " elsewhere." The penalty has already been imposed on a first batch of 300.

EQUAL PARTNERSHIP

A notable leading article in *The Times* of February 28th contained the following passage :

" In the perspective of history the fall of Singapore may appear as the greatest blow which has befallen the British Empire since the loss of the American colonies. In one sense it is equally irretrievable : British dominion in the Far East can never be restored—nor will there be any desire to see it restored—in its former guise. But in another sense defeats must serve, just as defeat in the American war of independence served, as the starting-point of a fresh advance in which, adapting herself to changed needs, Great Britain may once more become the pioneer of new policies and a new outlook. No alternative is open to her if she wishes to remain a Great Power. In the future scheme of things there is no place for the Britain of the past. She must and she can offer to the world of the twentieth century something which that world needs."

In half-a-dozen forceful sentences we are recalled to the simplicities of the fundamental human situation of challenge and response. Something decisive and irrevocable has happened ; there must be immediate and radical adjustment to the new situation.

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It is out of such realism that faith and hope are born. From its long experience of dealings with other races our nation has still a contribution to make to world history, but only on condition that we shake ourselves free from a dead past and live fearlessly in the real world.

The subject of the leading article was our future relations with China and India. It insisted that the old attitude of superiority must give place to one of partnership on equal terms. It urged with unanswerable force that "the equal and honoured place which China has won for herself at the Council table of war cannot be refused to her at the Council table of peace." It is unthinkable, for example, that the future of Hongkong should be determined in any way opposed to Chinese wishes. Similarly, however great the difficulties of the Indian problem, the future relations between this country and India can be arrived at only by a new spirit of partnership between equals.

It is idle to disguise the fact that this involves for the Anglo-Saxon peoples a fundamental change of mind. It is one of the chief offences of the Germans that they claim to be a *Herrenvolk* entitled to lord it over other peoples. But the prevailing Anglo-Saxon attitude towards other races has also been that of a *Herrenvolk*. Aloofness, arrogance, discourtesy, contempt, vitiate our relations with other races. These attitudes have to go. It is one of the crucial changes we have to face. Unless it comes about, there will be "no place for Britain in the future scheme of things." There will be no place, because other peoples will no longer tolerate such an attitude.

The weight of Russia may be expected to be thrown into the scales in favour of equality and mutual respect between the races. Stalin's declaration in his recent Order of the Day is deserving of careful attention :

"The strength of the Red Army lies in the fact that it does not and cannot entertain racial hatred for other peoples, including the German people, that it has been brought up in the spirit of the equality of all peoples and races, in the spirit of respect for the rights of other peoples. The Germans' racial theory and their practice of racial hatred has brought about a situation in which all freedom-loving peoples have become the enemies of Fascist Germany. The theory of race equality in the U.S.S.R. and the practice of respect of other peoples has brought about a situation where all freedom-loving peoples have become the friends of the Soviet Union."

Those of you who read the previous Supplement by Mr. Symons on "Ecumenical Christianity and the Working Classes" (C.N-L. No. 92) which attracted wide attention, will welcome this week's contribution from him on another subject on which his experience enables him to speak with intimate knowledge.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

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CHANGING INDUSTRY AND MORAL DECISION

By W. G. SYMONS

In " Religion and the Rise of Capitalism " Professor Tawney traces the abandonment by religion of its claim to judge the economic activities of man. This was partly due to the loss in the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries of the conception of the Church as an independent moral authority, and partly to a failure within the Church itself. Its social doctrines were " abandoned because, on the whole, they deserved to be abandoned ; the social teaching of the Church had ceased to count, because the Church itself had ceased to think."

To-day, the accusation of a failure to think on economic matters no longer applies. A series of pronouncements, from *Rerum Novarum* to the Malvern Report, and a great number of church organisations bear witness to a real concern for the life of industry. And yet the position is little different from the age of religious individualism. The growth of a substantial body of Christian social teaching which is, at any rate, partially consistent, clearly counts for next to nothing in the conduct of economic affairs ; it needs very little contact with practical industrial life to realise that ! I am not saying that the life of industry is dreadfully evil and given over to iniquity. Nor am I primarily concerned with the fact that many folk have discarded the authority of the Church. There are still plenty of keen and conscientious Church members in ordinary industrial life who are loyal to the Church and responsive to its teaching. Yet most of the recent work on the Christian faith and economic life has been the concern of a small circle of ecclesiastics, academic folk and enthusiasts ; it has hardly penetrated at all to the " rank and file " Christians, let alone to those outside the Churches.

The problem is deeper than one of publicity. The ineffectiveness of most of these pronouncements is not just because people do not see them ; nor because people, having seen them, are not interested in them ; nor because, having been interested, they do not obey them. It is because the issues raised and the moral judgments passed, in spite of their interest, seem to ordinary Christian men and women to be unrelated to the actual decisions which face them each day in the course of their work. As one very well-informed Church member said to me the other day, " It is like hitching a wagon to a star. We are conscious of the wagon right enough and there seems to be a star somewhere. But we don't have much clue as to the hitching ! "

THE MORAL PROBLEM POSED BY INDUSTRY

There is no need to emphasise the importance of industry to-day. The majority of members of the Christian Church are concerned in some way, during most of their waking hours, in the life of industry and commerce—mostly as wage-earners, some as managers or professional workers, a few as proprietors or individual traders. If their faith is to be more than a pious hobby, it must express itself in their working life—in the affairs of week-day as well as of Sunday. But what are Christian standards, how do we arrive at them and how do they guide us in the ordinary conduct of our work ? The normal run of sermons, religious books and even conference reports give little help. Ministers of religion, where they try to give clear moral guidance, usually seem to confine their teaching to other matters, such as sexual ethics. On the equally inescapable problems of factory and market-place they show a disconcerting vagueness, not only as to the facts, but as to how the Christian gospel comes into the picture at all. The layman does not want his decisions to be made for him, but he does want to know the Christian criteria for making the decisions. As Brunner has emphasised " if the Christian ethic fails at this point (of economic life) it fails all along the line." And there is no doubt that it is failing.

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Industrial life is in a peculiar and in many ways a key position. For one thing, it operates largely " below the surface." Its day-to-day proceedings are less the concern of theorists and publicists than, say, matters of education, politics or military strategy ; but whatever happens in the way of war or revolution, ordinary industrial production must go on. It develops less as a result of conscious choice than by the logic of its own organisation. These developments, unforeseen and unintended though they may be, have a way of taking charge of the situation and controlling the more obvious features of social life. If, for example, at the conclusion of the present war, heavy unemployment rears its head again, the Government will be unable to avoid centralised controls, whether it wants them or not.

INDIVIDUAL ETHICS OR POLITICS ?

Most current " Christian commentary " on industrial life is concerned with one of two things—either with individual behaviour or with the ordering of society. The first is the attempt to label particular actions as good or evil *per se* ; the key question is, " Is it legitimate for the Christian to do so and so ? " This attitude follows from the attempt in classical Christian morality to define the boundaries of sinful action ; it is linked in Catholic practice with the sacraments of Confession and Penance. In Protestant Christianity, for example in our British Free Churches, moral teaching is often vaguer ; but it is commonly based on the same attitude —whether Christians ought to do certain things. Obviously, this question has its place, and an important place ; the solid achievements of Christian casuistry demand, not less, but more attention. Yet the value of this approach in industry is limited. The vast majority of day-to-day decisions do not involve actions which can be authoritively stated to be sinful, or conversely to be obligatory, for Christians. Discussions of specific dishonesties in business (e.g. the worker who has to put misleading labels on goods) are largely a waste of time ; such " points of moral discomfort " only represent a tiny fraction of industrial life. Concentration on them leaves the majority of industrial decisions to be made according to expediency, and not subjected to any moral criticism. Many Christians see the moral landscape as a uniform grey with a few black spots ; they fail to discover light and shade throughout the whole.

This can be seen in quite practical terms. A worker may ask, " Is it lawful for me to join a trade union ?—to work hard with a view to promotion ?—to stand for election to the town council ? " On almost any scheme of Christian casuistry the answer to each of these questions, set in general terms, would be " Yes." Yet the really critical question is to choose between them. There must be many in authority in the trade union movement who have refused promotion up the managerial hierarchy in order that they might stay at the bench and serve their fellows in trade union organisation. An effective morality must come into play in helping people to make creative choices in a dynamic and changing situation, where each decision is largely novel, and where both immediate personal relations and long-run social consequences are involved. The individual has to discover where " to throw his weight " among the tangled mass of relative goods and evils forming the industrial scene.

The plane of " politics " is the plane of " economic blue prints," utopias, social aims, industrial charters and whatnot. These have been produced by Christian organisations in fair profusion in recent years. Usually they are more interesting than systems of individual morality or casuistry, especially to the politically minded. But they, again, often fail to link on to ordinary life. They give little guidance in practical decision to those who are working in our present confused hybrid system of controlled war-time capitalism, with its odd allocations of power between trade unions, capitalists and government departments.

Christian thinking has often tended to make an absolute distinction between action within the social system and the direct criticism of that system. A recent writer has maintained that " the preaching of the (Christian) ethic within this unchallenged framework has no value." In one sense this assertion is clearly true ; an ethic which acquiesces in the system is inadequate. But in a rapidly changing industrial situation, moral action within the system and action to change it are inseparable. There is a real risk of a false intellectualism among Christian folk at this point. " Challenging the social framework " is taken to mean having certain opinions about society and persuading other people to adopt them in general terms. Industrial organisations, however, change, and change radically, as a

result of a multitude of un-understood and partly understood decisions which are made in the course of daily work and are not obviously directed to change at all. For example, the extent and form of industrial controls after the war will not be determined so much by people deciding, " We want the controls to be organised in this way " and then persuading Parliament to adopt their scheme, as by the way in which groups and individuals—employers, trade unions, associations—are using, misusing or failing to use their powers *now*. The decision which a manager makes or the attitude which a shop steward takes up in his branch meeting to a given clause in the Essential Works Order may have a far more potent effect on the future organisation of industry than any amount of generalised pressure of opinion. Obviously this assertion needs qualification. The influence of the Nazi and Communist parties shows that groups of people with clear cut aims can be profoundly important. But the power of these movements has been in a large measure the result of close attention to political and industrial tactics—to the social " mechanics " of the situation as well as to ideas and programmes.

There is no need to despair of the exercise of intelligent moral choice in industry. The crucial moral decisions however, lie in the intervening country between ordinary " morals " and " politics." An employer gives conditions of work in bare conformity with legal requirements or provides welfare measures well above the normal standards. A trade union branch discusses whether to support and perhaps to capture a " works committee " proposed by the management of a factory, or whether to boycott it. A manager considers alternative selling policies, some in conformity with the trade association and others likely to wreck the price agreement. A Church member decides whether to spend his week-night evenings on Sunday-school preparation, work for his trade union or running the local " co-op." These decisions determine not merely questions of justice and the use of social power now, but what the " new Britain " after the war will be like.

How can the Church's moral teaching become effective so that Christian folk may, at any rate, know what it means to do justly in their work even if, being human, they often fail ? How can its writ run and its judgments have meaning in relation to the ordering of industrial life ? It seems to me that there are three points at which the subject must be attacked ; at these points the attack should be concentrated and clear, but they should be kept distinct. These are not new points, and good work has been done on them, but more remains to be done.

POINTS OF JUDGMENT

First, the Church should endeavour to identify " points of judgment." I mean by this *criteria* of right or wrong in industrial behaviour or in the industrial situation. Christian bodies should limit themselves at this point to matters fairly directly deducible from Christian doctrine and with the minimum of technical content. It would be fatal to suggest that matters of organisation and technique are morally indifferent ; but it would be equally fatal to take the edge off Christian witness on fundamental matters by confusing the issue with technical debate.

The Economics Report of the Oxford Conference, in its analysis of " the four points at which the purpose of God is challenged," provides a good example of this type of fundamental judgment. The recent publication of the Commission of the Churches *Social Justice and Economic Reconstruction* gives useful standards in its " Charter for the Individual." Its " Charter for Industry," however, while not necessarily wrong and while dealing with matters which are certainly not morally indifferent, is on another plane. It is questionable as to how far these latter questions are matters for Christian pronouncements, though they are certainly matters for the moral decision of Christians. The main impact of the Christian faith on economic life is not to be made by manifestos bearing the label " Christian," but by individual Christians who know which way they want to go and are acting with intelligence and a measure of opportunism in the tortuous ways of industry.

THE ART OF MORAL DECISION

The second point of attack comes home to the life of the parish and congregation. Christian folk miss moral opportunities, time and again, and when they are faced with what they recognise to be a problem of conscience they do not know how " to set about it."

The chaos of moral method among convinced Christian folk should be the urgent concern of the clergy. The parson must be qualified to help his people to learn what

is their Christian duty, to discriminate in the common choices of life and to be awake to the call of God in practical affairs. The ethical material, both ancient and modern, is available ; the problem is " to get it over." In spite of real loyalty and devotion to their work, many men are coming into the Christian ministry who are unable to put their ethical thinking into a practical and relevant form. I certainly do not suggest the teaching of a uniform and water-tight casuistry, nor that the parson should have answers for all the problems of conduct. But the layman does look for a greater sureness of touch by the clergy in matters of right and wrong ; he does not look for certainty, but he does need to be put on the right track in finding out his Christian duty. It is better to direct folk along a line of fruitful mistakes than to say that " it is all very difficult and we must hope for guidance "—which means, in fact, doing nothing. Industrial life is not as difficult or involved as we are sometimes led to believe. The moral problems of industry are direct and immediate to the normal lay Christian ; they are nothing like as abstruse as some of the things which Christian folk worry about. The confusion and moral indifference of the ordinary Christian on industrial matters is much more the result of inadequate Christian teaching than of the complexity of the material.

INDUSTRIAL TACTICS

The final question is one of tactics. Even when we know our aims—the things for which we are striving in the life of industry—we still need to find out what is happening so that we may direct our efforts to the key points. Many Christian manifestos seem, to borrow a military metaphor, to be attacking all along the line without trying to find out the disposition of the enemy. The result, as I have suggested, is the growth of a vague sentiment on the part of Christian folk about industrial matters, which is not directed into any particular line of action and is largely dissipated. So those who share a common concern for the life of industry can fruitfully exchange their experience and information, perhaps by discussion, perhaps in the pages of Christian periodicals. What is needed, however, is information, not judgment. Some discrimination is required certainly, in identifying the tendencies which are really significant ; but the urgent need is to discover just what is happening and to learn something of the " mechanics " of industrial organisation. One such tendency, selected purely as an example, is the growth of a self-conscious trained managerial group which is developing a professional ethos of its own ; another is the change in the status and powers of trade unionism at the present time. It is almost wholly mischievous for Christian bodies to approve or condemn these tendencies, in general terms, from outside. But they are the fields in which some of the major moral conflicts of the time are being worked out.

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